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Wimbledon 2019: Simona Halep wins first SW19 title with stunning performance against Serena Williams

Halep needed just 56 minutes to defeat the 23-time Grand Slam champion and clinch her maiden title at SW19 in style

Paul Newman Wimbledon | @PaulN54 | 14 hours ago |

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Power is so often the crucial factor in modern-day tennis, but Simona Halep proved on Saturday that athleticism, skill and clear thinking can also have their day. In one of the most remarkable Wimbledon finals of modern times, the 27-year-old Romanian ran Serena Williams ragged on Centre Court to win 6-2, 6-2 in just 55 minutes and deny the 37-year-old American the victory she needed to equal Margaret Court's all-time record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles.

Halep, who stands just 5ft 6in tall, is a former world No 1 and won her first Grand Slam title at last year's French Open, but had gone into her first final here as the clear underdog. Williams, seven times a champion on Centre Court, was playing in her 32nd Grand Slam final but suffered the heaviest defeat of her Wimbledon career.

Williams, who had won nine of her 10 previous meetings with Halep, has struggled with a knee injury this year and probably paid for her lack of matches – she had not faced any top 10 opponents since the Australian Open – though you had to give full credit to her opponent for a stunning performance.

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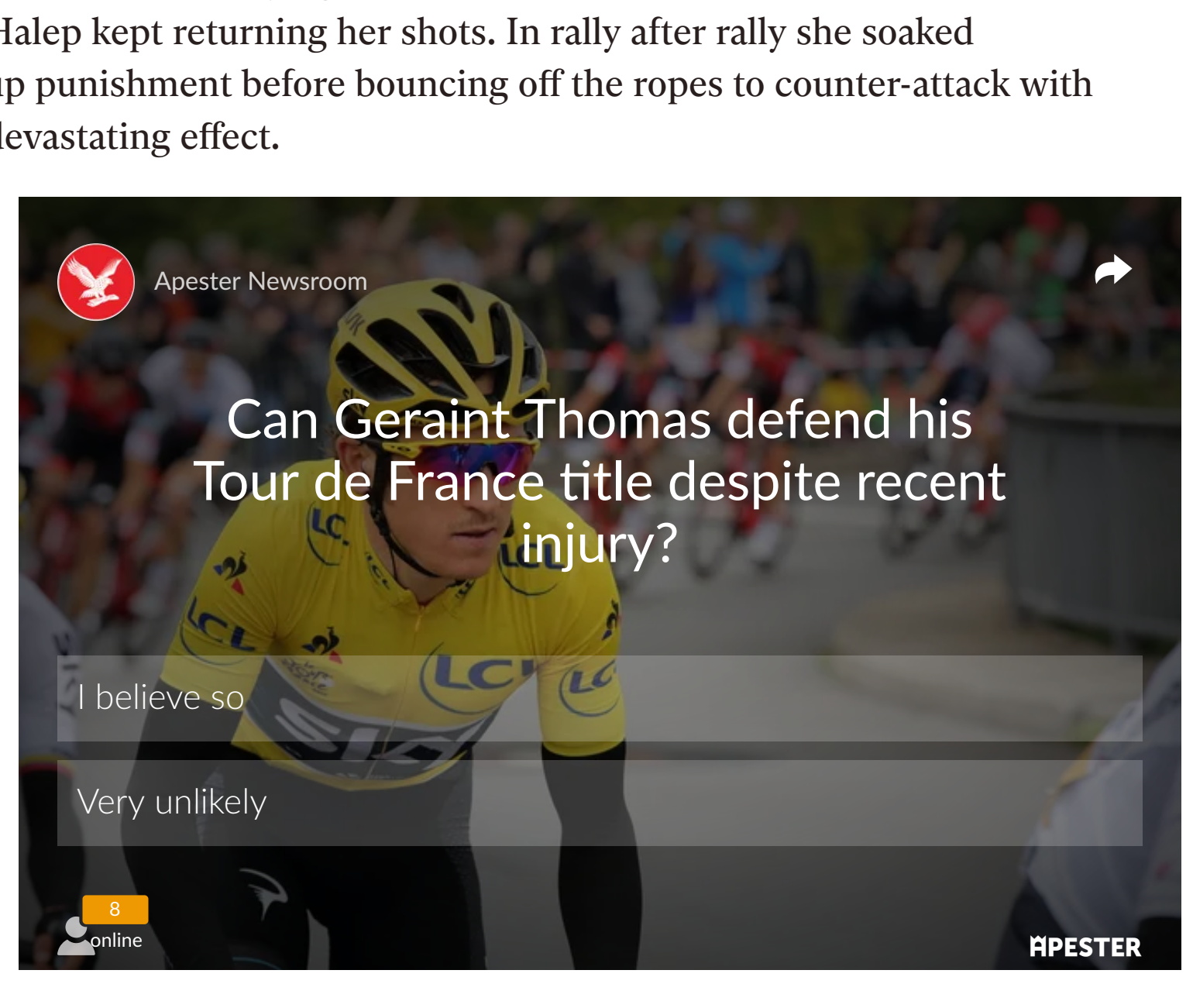
The world No 7 is one of the best athletes on the tour and covered the ground at electrifying speed. No matter how hard Williams hit the ball, Halep kept returning her shots. In rally after rally she soaked up punishment before bouncing off the ropes to counter-attack with devastating effect.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When Halep had the opportunity to attack, she hit some spectacular winners. Williams hit 17 winners to Halep's 13, but the more telling statistic was the American's 25 unforced errors to Halep's three. While Halep was a model of consistency, Williams, feeling the pressure to force the pace, kept making mistakes.

Halep said afterwards that it was the best she had ever played. "I have worked a lot for this moment," she said. "I had nerves. My stomach was not very well before the match, but I knew there was no time for emotions. I just came out on court and gave my best."

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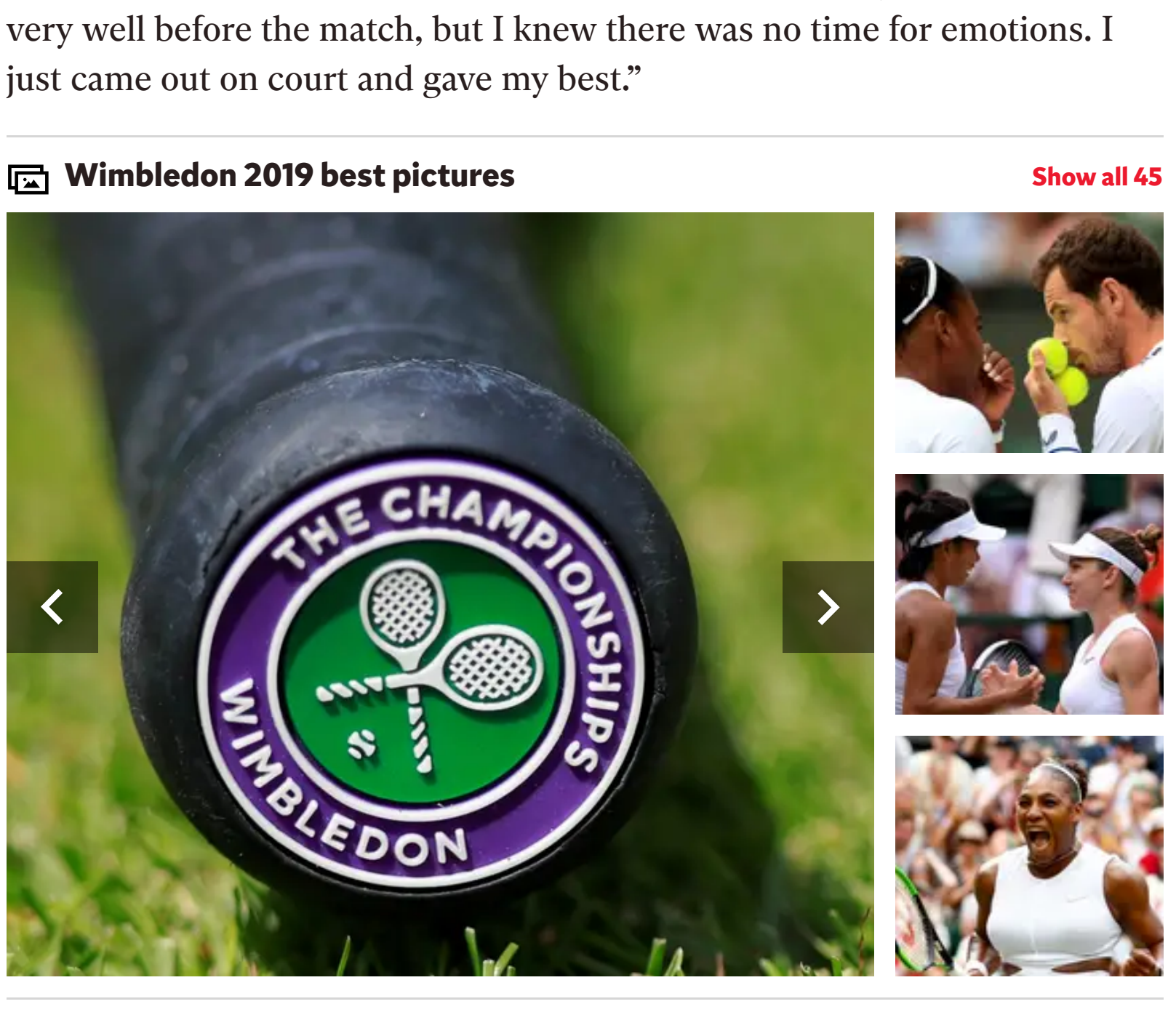


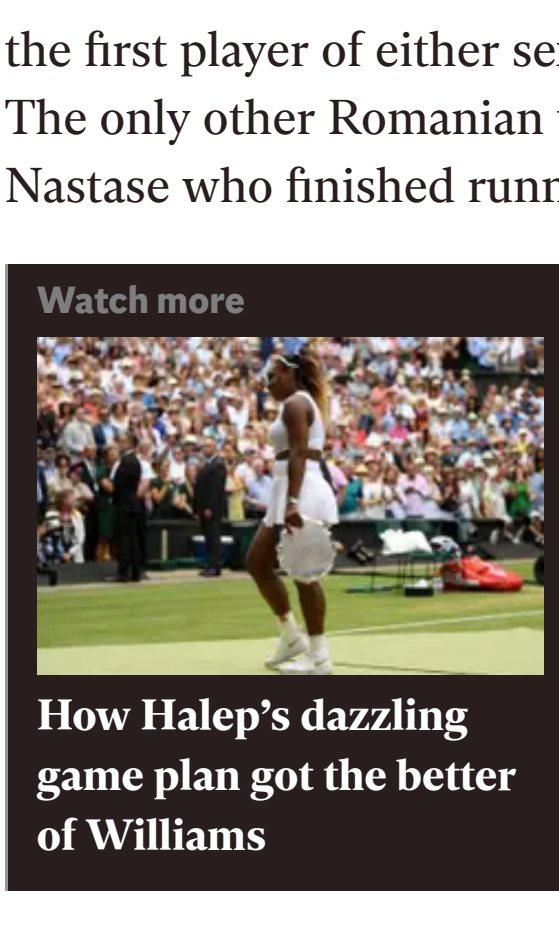
Asked how it felt to hold the trophy, Halep said: "It's unbelievable. It's something very special. I will never forget this day. It was my mum's dream when I was about 10 or 12. She said that if I wanted to do something in tennis I had to play in the final at Wimbledon."

Halep said her mother, who was in the crowd with her father, had been unable to speak after the match because of her tears. "I just hugged her and kissed her," Halep said.

She added: "At the beginning of the tournament I told the people in the locker room that if I could win the tournament it would be amazing because I would get membership for life."

After the match Halep talked to Philip Brook, the Wimbledon champion, about the benefits of membership. "He told me: 'Any time you want, you can come, have dinner, have lunch, play a little bit of tennis.' I will come for sure."

The first Romanian woman to play in a Wimbledon singles final, Halep is the first player of either sex from her country to win a singles title here. The only other Romanian to reach a Wimbledon singles final was Ilie Nastase who finished runner-up in 1972 and 1976.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How Halep's dazzling game plan got the better of Williams

When play got under way under overcast skies on a warm and still afternoon, Halep got down to business immediately. Williams was playing in her 32nd Grand Slam final, but looked more nervous as her opponent made a flying start.

Halep led 4-0 after just 11 minutes and it was immediately clear that her speed would be a major factor. On the second point of the third game Williams appeared to be in control as she pulled Halep from one side of the court to the other, but the exchange finished with Halep somehow chasing down a shot into the tramlines and thumping a magnificent backhand cross-court winner.

Williams finally got on the scoreboard at 4-1 and forced Halep to save a break point in the following game, but within 26 minutes the first set was in the bag.

At the start of the second Williams was hitting the ball more freely and when she bellowed out huge roars of "C'mon!" in the opening game it seemed that a revival might be under way.

At 2-2, however, Halep broke again after a point that summed up the match. Having pulled Halep from one side of the court to the other, Williams opened up the court for a backhand down-the-line winner, only to put too much on the ball and hit it beyond the baseline.

When Williams served at 2-4 Halep broke again with a glorious backhand winner down the line. Serving for victory, Halep did not show any sign of nerves, winning the game to love. A service winner took her to match point and Williams' netted forehand did the rest, upon which Halep sank to her knees, a look of disbelief on her face.

Williams admitted afterwards: "She literally played out of her mind. I was a little bit like a deer in the headlights."

The American has now lost in all three Grand Slam finals she has played since she returned to competition as a mother last year and has not won a title anywhere since the 2017 Australian Open.

"I just have to figure out a way to win a final," she said. "Maybe playing other finals outside of Grand Slams would be really helpful just to kind of get in the groove so by the time I get to a Grand Slam final I'm used to what to do and how to play."

Halep said that in preparing for the final she had tried not to think too much about her opponent. "I've always been a little bit intimidated when I faced Serena," she said.

"Today I decided before the match that I was going to focus on myself and on the final of Grand Slam, not on her. That's why I was able to play my best, to be relaxed, and to be able to be positive and confident against her.

"I decided this morning how I had to play against her. I knew exactly what I had to do to put her in trouble, not to let her play her game. When she has time, she plays unbelievable."

Halep said that until this final she had never thought about the possibility of winning here. "I never thought that I would be able to win on grass with all these players that are very tall and serving with a lot of power," she said.

The Romanian said she had made a particular point of practising her returns of serve on Friday. "I knew it was really important to return," she said."I felt like I knew where she was serving. Even if she served strong, I returned the ball. I knew that if I put the return back, I would have a better chance."

Halep also said that Roger Federer's words of encouragement for her after his semi-final victory had helped. "I really believe that there is a chance if I listen to him," she said with a smile. "Because if you listen to him, you get the good things."

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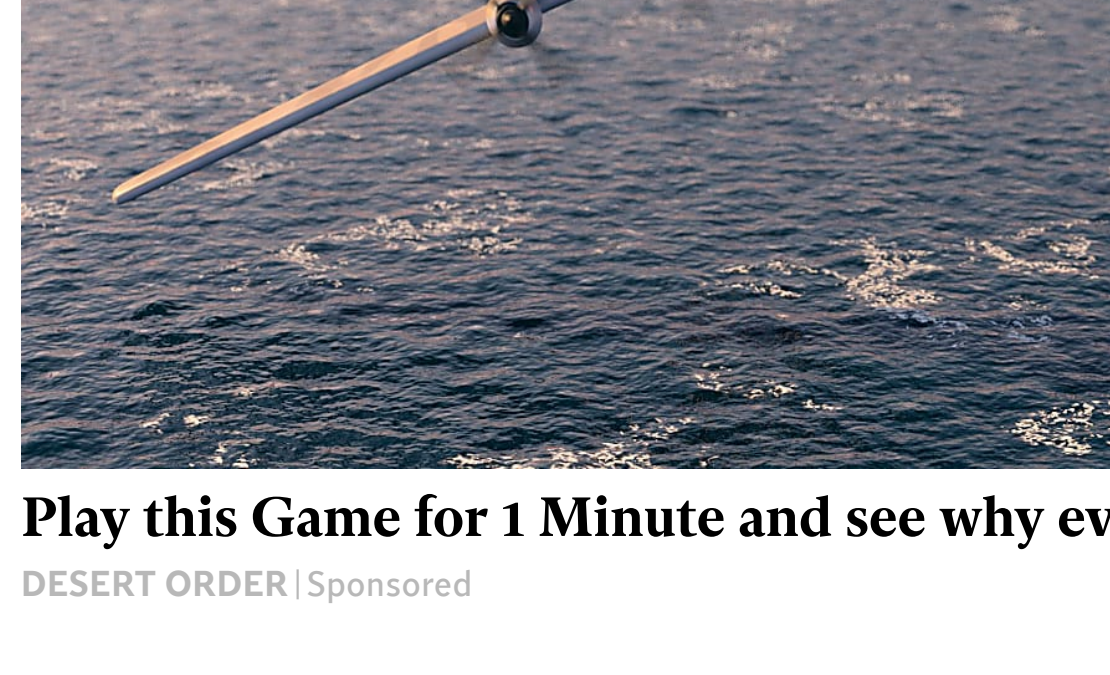
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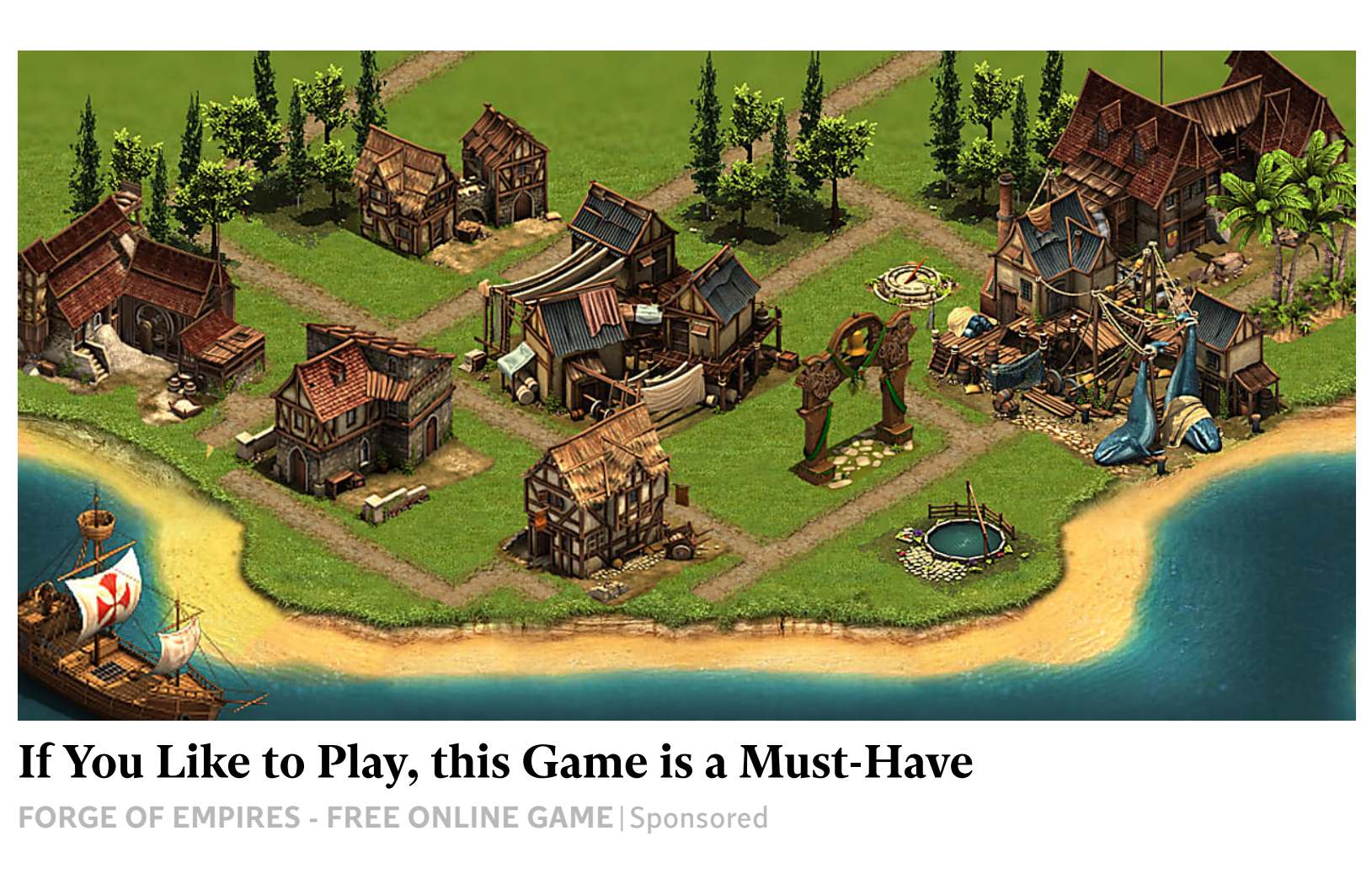
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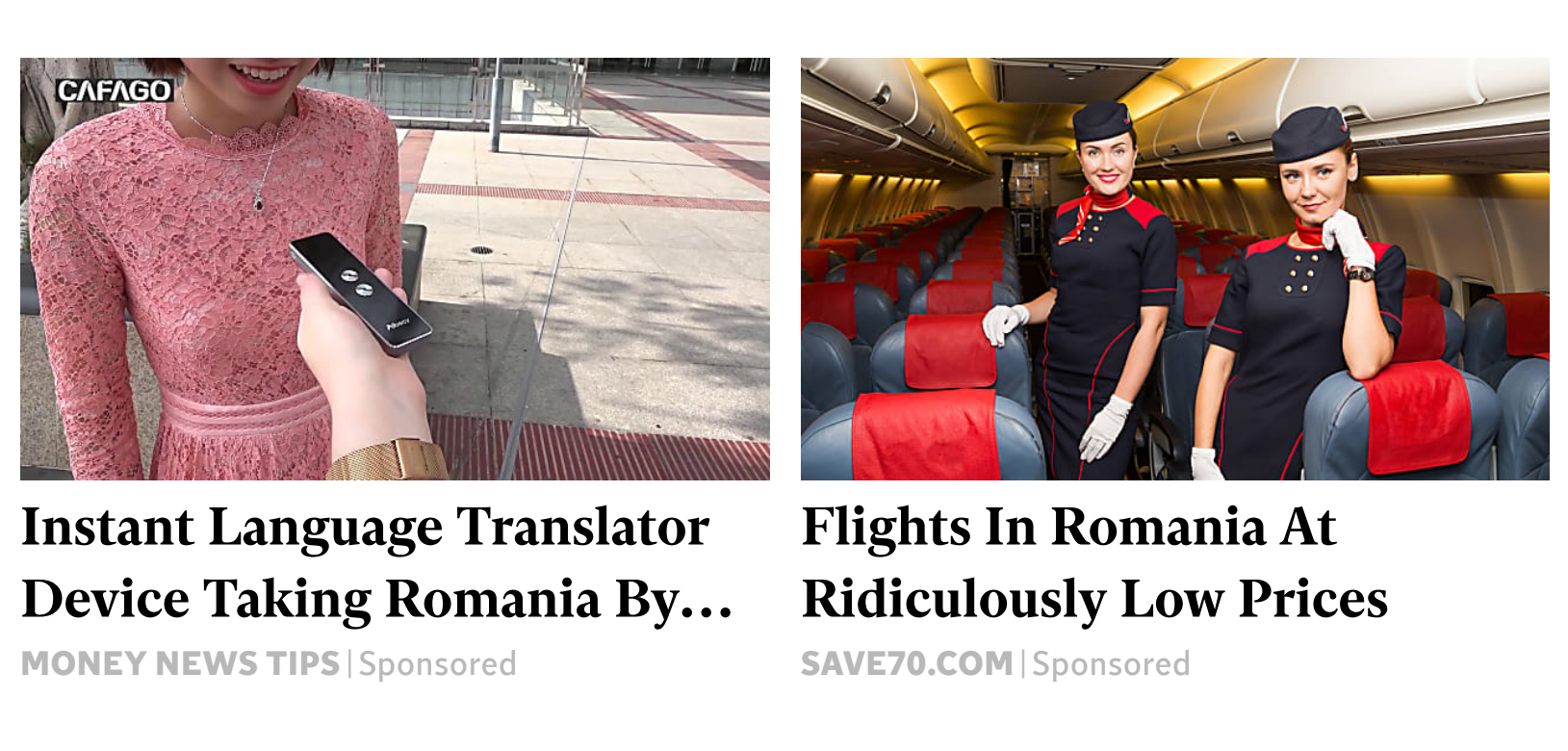
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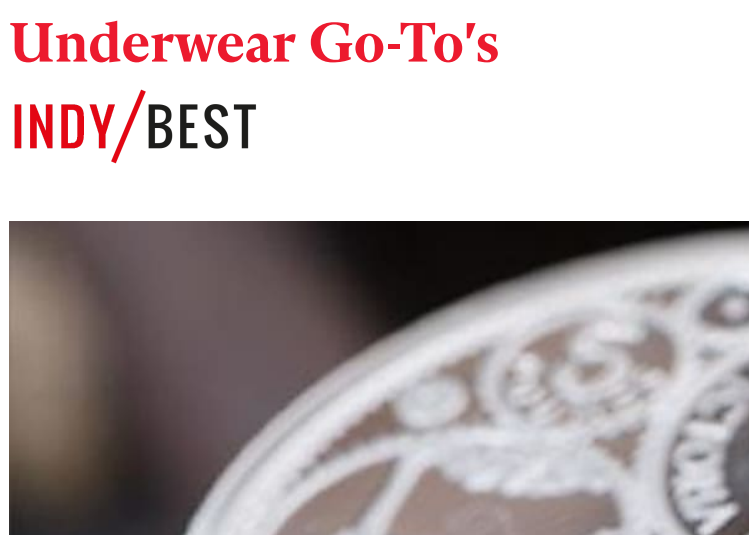
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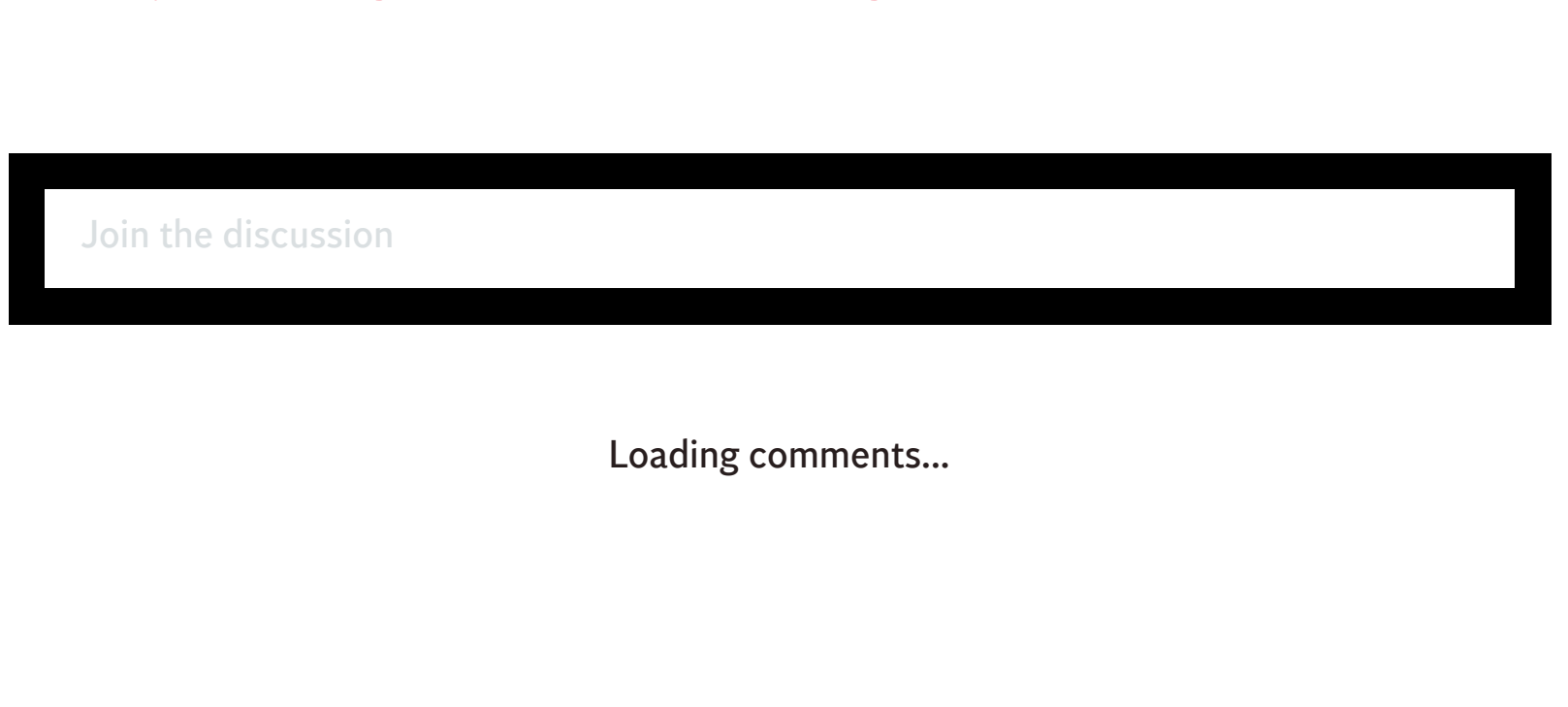
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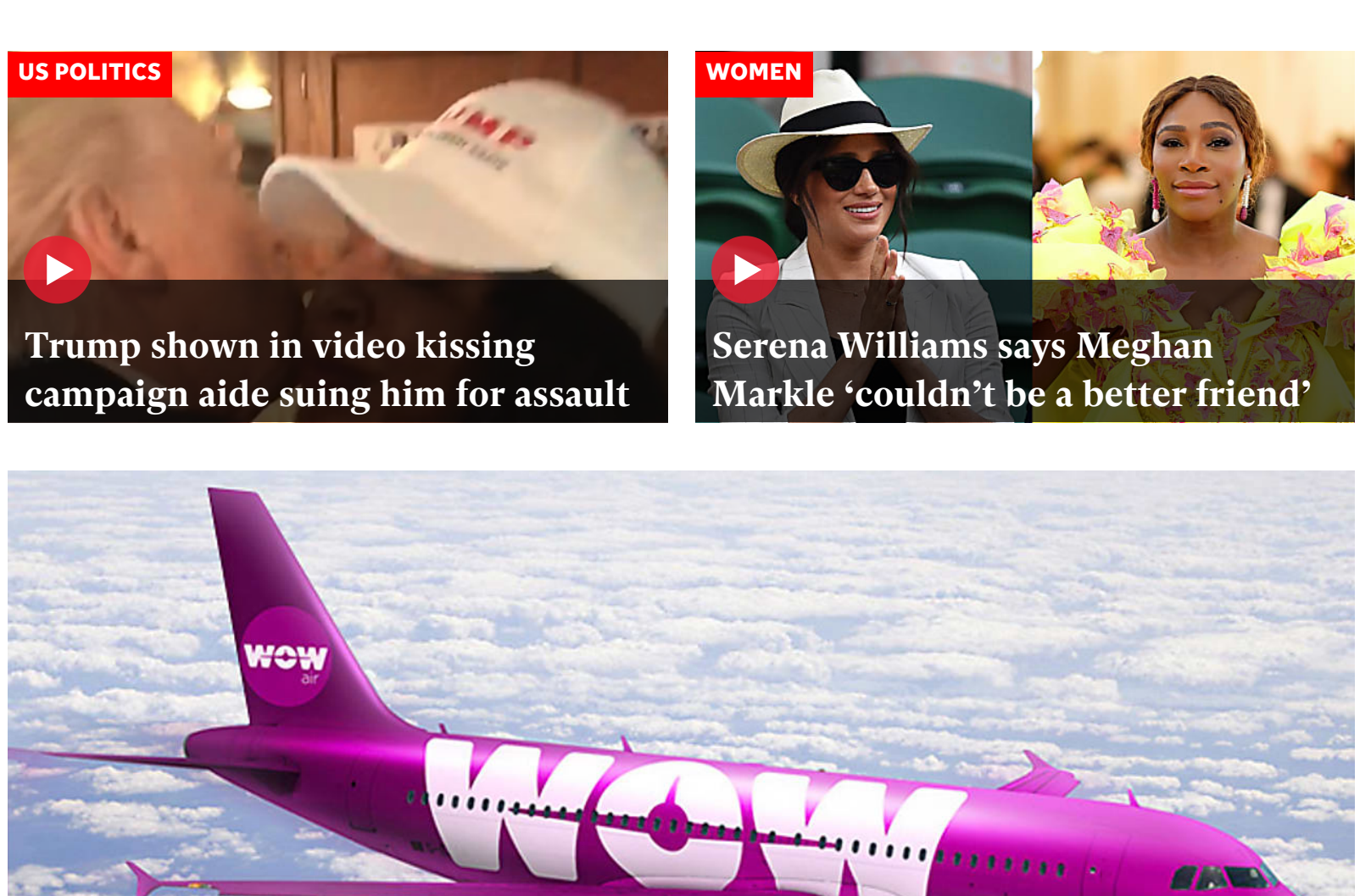
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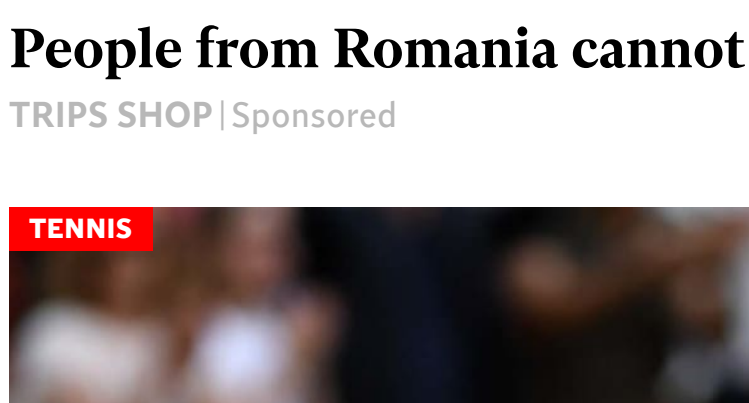
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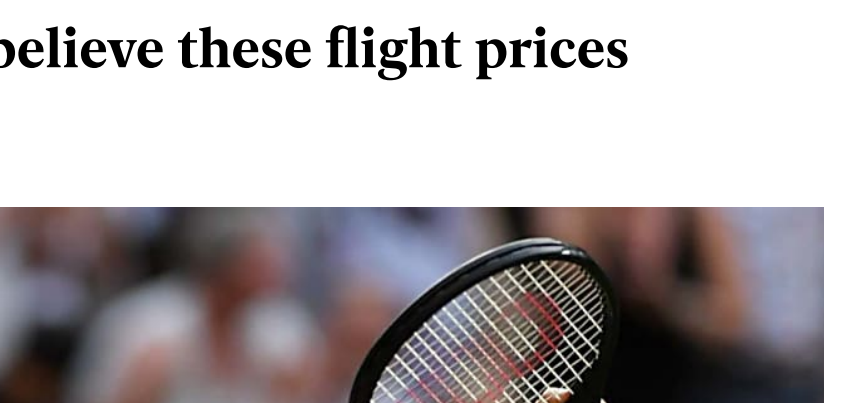
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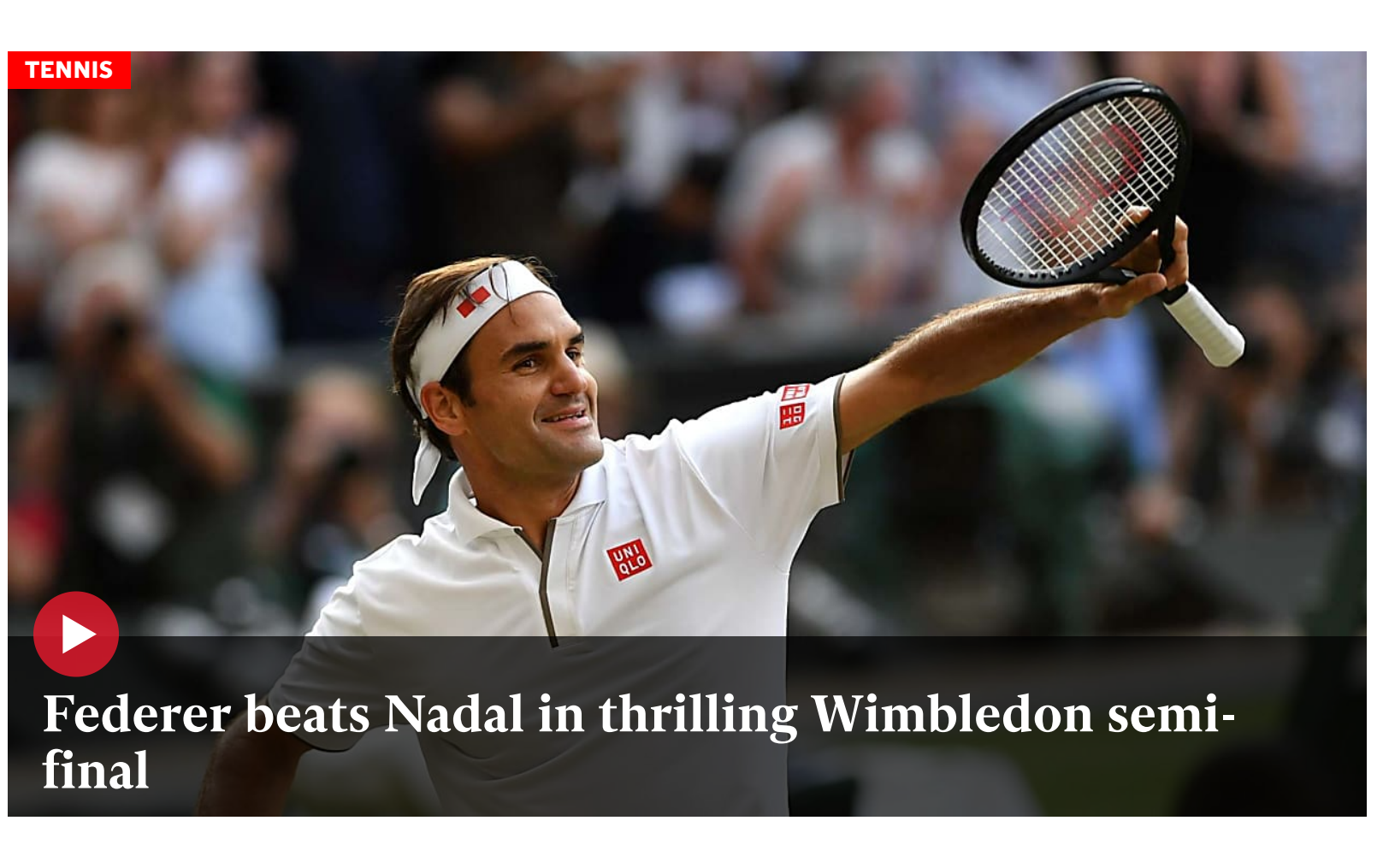
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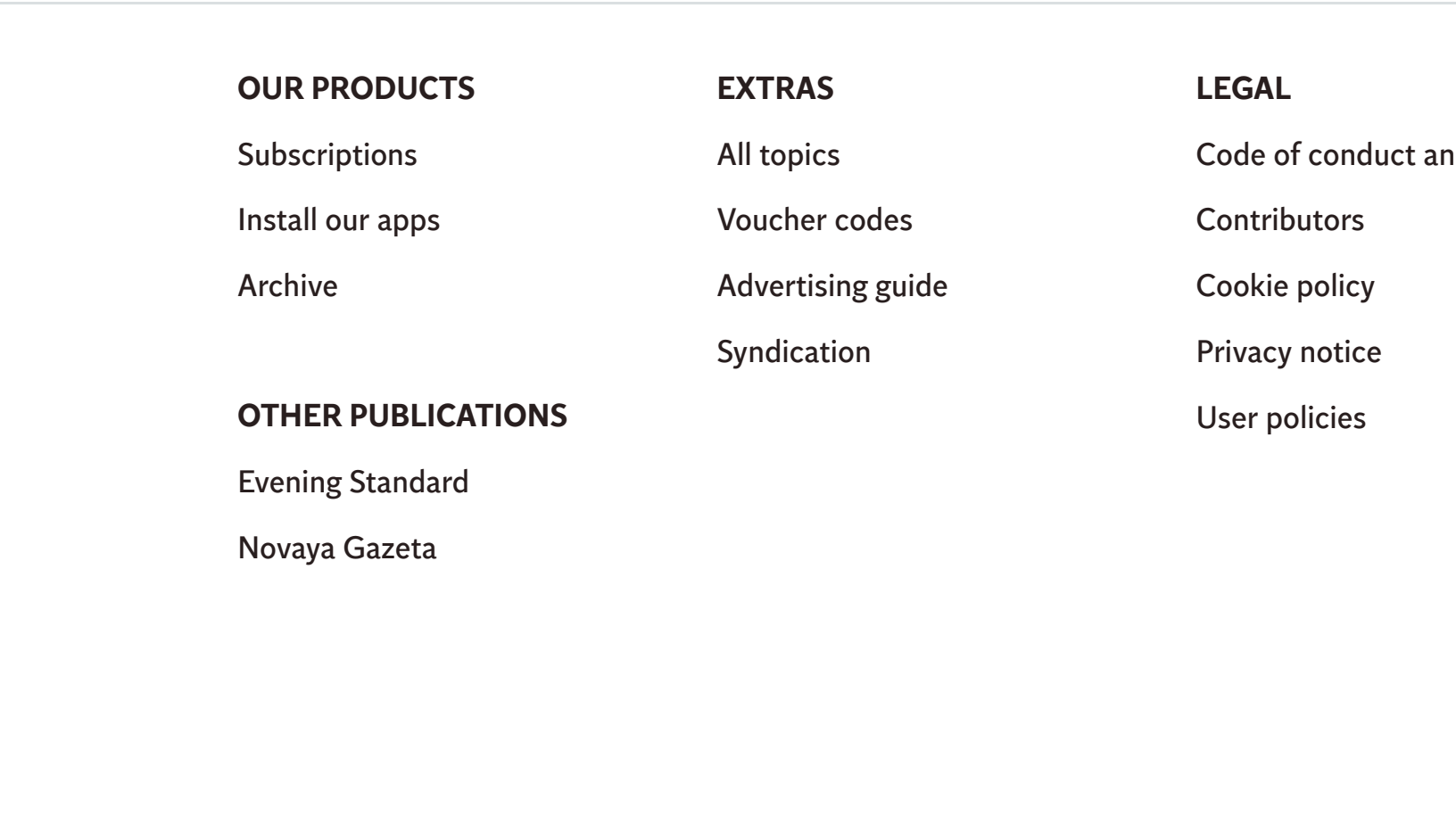
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